



Lecture 7

Developing Maturity for Life

The Character of Jesus

God depicts Jesus as a lamb and the Holy Spirit as a dove.

God chose these two creatures because they are devoid of malice or aggression; they both represent purity and humility. In the book of Revelation, we see the Lamb of God being the only one who has the authority to open the scrolls. Jesus is the Lamb, the Holy Spirit is the Dove.

Contrary to this world, authority in the Kingdom of God comes from humility, from sacrifice and from obedience to God's Word. Jesus demonstrated total surrender to His Father and humbled Himself; not considering Himself, but only doing the will of the Father.

It is the same with us. Outside of humility and obedience to God's Word, we have no spiritual authority. Self, pride, the ego and self-reliance cannot exercise God-given authority. A man can have "worldly" authority related to natural things, such as in his roles as an employer, a father, husband, president, teacher, but this power and authority without God will not bear any good fruit, it will fail.

Revelation 5:12 (the Lamb)

"saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb who has been slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and eulogy."

Luke 3:22 (the Dove)

"and the Holy Spirit in a form like that of a dove descended upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, As for you, you are my Son, the beloved one, in whom I take pleasure".

If we don't cultivate the character of the Lamb with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will display the character of the beast. There is nothing in between: it is either the Holy Spirit or the beast (Satan) whom we are representing. Immature people, because of ignorance and/or innocence, display the character of the beast when reacting according to the flesh. The beast came to steal, kill and destroy; the Lamb came to save, heal, deliver.

Why self matters

Self matters in the sense that we need to agree with our Heavenly Father about ourselves. When God looks at us He sees only His Son, Jesus. We must embrace the truth and not hold onto negative thoughts or emotions about ourselves. We are to focus only on righteousness, not on darkness. When addressing our weaknesses and strongholds, we must do it from the perspective of righteousness and our authority in Christ, and not out of guilt, shame and condemnation. We are loved by our Heavenly Father; we are not judged. We are to love ourselves as we love God and others, and as God loves us. We are not to judge ourselves according to the flesh, because we are the righteousness of Christ. When we allow the enemy to put guilt, condemnation or fear etc. onto us, we permit the sinful nature to interfere in our Christian life. The Holy Spirit will convict us of righteousness; from this perspective, we reject and renounce anything contrary to God's Word.

1 John 4:17

"In this has been brought to completion the aforementioned love which is in us [produced by the Holy Spirit], which love exists in its completed state, resulting in our having unreservedness of speech at the day of the judgment, because just as that One is, also, as for us, we are in this world."

THE REFINING FIRE

1 Peter 1:6-7

In which last season you are to be constantly rejoicing with a joy that expresses itself in a triumphant exuberance, although for a little while at the present time if perchance there is need for it, you have been

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made sorrowful in the midst of many different kinds of testings in order that the approval of your faith, which faith was examined by testing for the purpose of being approved, that approval being much more precious than the approval of gold which perishes, even though that gold be approved by fire-testing, may be discovered after scrutiny to result in praise and glory and honor at the time of the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Trials and tribulations are necessary for testing the believer's faith. It is described as the goldsmith purifying the gold. The final stage of gold production -- refining -- involves removing impurities that remain after the smelting process.

While the refining fire (the trials and tribulations) is underway, we know God is removing impurities in our lives. We are to rejoice knowing that God is using this process to make us more like Jesus.

Becoming more like Jesus, becoming mature

It is important to depend on the Holy Spirit and keep on obeying God's Word to the best of our ability, because when the trials and tribulations come, we know it is because we put Jesus first; then we can rejoice in God's refreshing power.

1 Peter 4:12-14

"Divinely loved ones [divinely loved by God], stop thinking that the smelting process which is [operating] among you and which has come to you for the purpose of testing [you], is a thing alien to you, but insofar as you share in common with the sufferings of Christ, be rejoicing, in order that also at the time of the unveiling of His glory, you may rejoice exultingly. In view of the fact that you have cast in your teeth, as it were, revilings because of the Name of Christ, spiritually prosperous [are you], because the Spirit of the Glory, even the Spirit of God, is resting with refreshing power upon you".

When we feel the heat of tough times, difficult circumstances, relationship problems, financial struggles, sickness, this is the time to apply God's Word and to realise that all these are gold in God's hands. Like the goldsmith's fire, this heat will bring the impurities of our soul to the surface, where God (the purifier) removes these impurities from us.

In general terms, Christians resent trials and tribulations. Some even think that God is punishing them, or that God is not interested in them. We need to learn to rejoice in our trials and tribulations and see God's hand in all our affairs. Going through tough times with Jesus means sacrifice, but it also means investing in the Kingdom of God. This is a sign of having achieved spiritual maturity and readiness for more spiritual development.

The works of the flesh

When we disobey God and go through trials, our suffering becomes worthless and we cannot rejoice because there is no purification, but rather the bad repercussions of the works of the flesh through disobedience. The works of the flesh don't produce good fruit. This will not only affect our own lives, but the lives of others.

Every Christian's goal should be to acquire the character of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is sanctifying the believer constantly. God is in control of our lives. Jesus is our shepherd and intercessor. Our part in our relationship with Jesus is to obey His Word and to do our best to imitate Jesus. In time, acting on the Word of God becomes a lifestyle, our new, good habits will bring peace, joy, wisdom, power and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

We need to renew our minds in order to have "God's thoughts" (i.e. replacing the old with the new) and live a spiritual life in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "MATURITY" ACCORDING TO THE WORLD AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD.

Man's wisdom without God is considered foolishness according to the Bible. Man without God is utterly lost and dead, and will only produce the works of the flesh. A man without God is ruled by the sinful nature.